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Disaster of Love and War: A Psychoanalytical Study of Ernest Hemingway's 'A Farewell to Arms'

Abstract

Ernest Miller Hemingway is one of the many American writers who lived during the World War I and was highly affected by it. He wrote a number of well-known war novels in which he vanishes the illusion of idealization of war, condemned the war for its inhuman violence and irrational deaths. Hemingway was loaded with the firsthand experience of war. He himself took part in the First World War, witnessed the holocaust caused by it and endured not only physical pain but also the psychological wound. The bitter memories of the war find its expression in his novel *A Farewell to Arms*, where he has clearly given vent to his feelings of hatred of war. Hemingway in this novel through the character of Frederic Henry has expressed his disillusionment with the war. In this paper the researcher has taken up the challenge to unveil effects of war and love on the lives of Henry and Catherine from

psychological point of view. The researcher aims to highlight the ugliness of war in contrast with the beauty accompanying love. It shows how war destroys the human being's most valuable thing that is love. In a war ravaged world of despair and gloom, both Fredric Henry and Catherine Barkley suffer from disillusionment and failure of love. The Great War rendered both Catherine and Henry crushed in numbers and jaded in spirit. The researcher extensively analyzes the role of Hemingway hero Frederic Henry and heroine Catherine Barkley who stand alone against a war ravaged universe, making an effort to preserve their sanity and integrity by saving their love life. Hemingway maintains that there is nothing glamorous or heroic about war and thus exposes the hollowness and futility of war through the character of Henry and Catherine who suffer from mental torture because of their unfulfilled love.

Key Words: death, love, psychology, trauma, violence, war

Ernest Miller Hemingway is a major novelist of "the Roaring Twenties" and the winner of Nobel Prize. He was born in 1899 in a wealthy family of Chicago. He wrote many novels like *The Sun also Rises* (1926), *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940), *Death in the Afternoon* (1932). He participated in the war and his tragedy was that the insecurity, depression, and paranoia that gave him significant materials worth writing was like an addiction to a drug, to gradually and publicly be dramatized through his writing. His novels are packed with the elements like trauma, alienation, sense of loss and failure, mental breakdown, broken relationship and schizophrenia.

The greater part of the reviewers of Hemingway examined his novels from different viewpoints and perspectives. There is no full length comprehensive study on the disaster of

love and war on the lives of Henry and Catherine from psychological point of view. Nadine Gordimer (1999) in his article “Hemingway's Expatriates” discusses the stylistic techniques of Hemingway but there is no reference to the psychological ailments of the protagonists. Milton R Stein (1970) explores the themes of alienation in the novels of Hemingway. Richard Chase intensively reviewed the war novels of 1920s and observes that a dream of money pollutes the sensibility of the protagonists of Hemingway and destroy them. The critics and reviewers didn't pay real attention to the growing neurosis in the life of the protagonists of Hemingway. Fantina discusses in detail the man woman relationship in this book but there is no reference to the psychological ailments suffered by the protagonists of Hemingway.

Thus different aspects have been discussed but there is little discussion about the psychological trauma faced by Henry and Catherine due to love and war. The novel is actually about the Protagonist Frederic Henry's peripatetic journey through the novel—through the muddy battle lines of World War I, a whirlwind romance with VAD nurse Catherine Barkley, a dangerous desertion to Switzerland, and the unexpected grief of Barkley's death during childbirth—leaves him disillusioned ,convinced that love is not enough to replace a discarded world. After the death of Catherine, Henry has been left aside in disillusionment, uncertainty and aimlessness since the disastrous war has made him think that the world he lives in can no longer support his ideas on love, life, happiness and contentment.

The novel *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) is actually an autobiographical sketch of Hemingway. In 1918, Hemingway joined the war as an ambulance driver for the Red Cross, which sent him to Italy. He was wounded by an exploding shell and was sent to Milan for

treatment. During his recovery, he fell in love with a nurse; an episode that he portrayed in his novel *A Farewell to Arms* (1929). As a journalist, ambulance driver and war reporter, Hemingway had witnessed horrible scenes of death and destruction.

His shattering experiences during war changed his vision of life. He was seriously concerned with the issue of psychic injury. Hemingway knew the pain of loss and illness, earning an inescapable knowledge of disease that influenced much of his work. War severely affected the sensitivity of Hemingway. Discouraged and depressed, he ventured to unveil the ugly face of war. Leo Gurko praises Hemingway for his realistic and veritable account of war. He says : "A Farewell to Arms could almost serve as a manual on trench warfare" Gurko (15).

In his introduction to his book *Men at War*, Hemingway uncovered the bitter realities of war. He says: "when you go to war as a boy you have a great illusion of immortality. Other people got killed; not you. Then when you are badly wounded the first time you lose that illusion" (4).

The subject of war in this novel is woven with the theme of love. War contrasts strongly with the noble sentiments of love. In fact, the novel can be stated as a tragic love story of Henry and Catherine set against the First World War. It is set against the backdrop of World War 1, describes a love affair between the expatriate Henry and an English nurse, Catherine Barkley. Life became a more traumatic expression of disillusionment in love in his fiction, until physically he could no longer play the part. In this novel, Hemingway shows the world of war with all its ugliness, violence, insanity, and irrationality. Besides giving an

accurate account of the war, Hemingway has given an insightful description of the psychology of tortured Henry and Catherine.

The novel has Frederic Henry and Catherine Barkley as its central characters through whom Hemingway has expressed his disillusionment with the war. Catherine Barkley is depicted as a beautiful woman and she is a nurse from England who helps the war victims in Italy in World War I. But she is also suffering from psychological trauma. Before she falls in love with Lt. Frederick Henry, she has had engagement with a soldier for eight years but he was killed in the war. "He was a very nice boy. He was going to marry me and he was killed in the Somme" (Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms* 16). Catherine is emotionally disturbed, even to the point of trying to turn him into her dead fiancé. She was not killed or physically wounded to the same degree as soldier, she did nevertheless suffer serious psychological damage. In fact, at times during Frederic's recuperation in Milan, she sees herself as "Scotch and crazy" (126).

She pathologically transfers her unresolved feelings for her dead fiancé onto Frederic. When she joins in the war and before she meets Frederick, she still loves her fiancé, although he has already died. Catherine and Frederick meet and then they fall in love. But, behind their love story, the researcher finds some problems on Catherine which are interesting to be discussed. She still memorizes her fiancé by bringing a stick. "What is the stick?" I asked...It belonged to a boy who was killed last year" (18). Catherine displaces the object that is the fiancé into the stick which can make her close to him. It is the war that separates Catherine and her fiancé. War has taken her lover to the world of no return and she left with his memories which keep on tormenting her every moment. Catherine is mentally disturbed

to the extent that she tends to cut her hair. She changes the object to her hair as her sacrifice to him.

I was going to cut it all off when he died...

I wanted to do something for him.

You see I didn't care about the other thing and

he could have had anything he wanted if I would have known.

I would have married him or anything.(14)

She regrets he dies before she marries him. It is her projection to replace what she should give him by cutting her hair. We can see her melancholia rooted not only in her fiancé death but also in her own war experience that continually revives that loss.

War not only instrumental in taking her fiancé away but it has such a disastrous effect on her mind that she cannot go further in her life. She cannot open her heart to other men so that when Frederick kisses her, she does not give her soul to him. She represses herself not to open her heart. Catherine, in fact, has already endured the personal loss of her fiancé who has already died in the war. She is aware of Henry's initial feelings for her and knows that it's only a "rotten game" (27). Catherine willingness to risk love again in order to restore her private world of love shows that she is mentally weak now and has been wounded by love and war. Infrequently, Catherine does speak to Frederic about her psychological pain when she says:

I haven't been happy for a long time

and when I met you perhaps I was nearly crazy. Perhaps I was crazy.(101)

She turns to Henry to relieve her mental pain. With him, she can release her tension and gets pleasure. Now, she can forget her fiancé. "Come to bed again...You see," she said: "I do anything you want"(106). She is ready to sacrifice herself for Frederick. She gives the

most important thing for women to Frederick which she does not give to her fiancé. Having relationship with Frederic, Catherine feels comfortable with him. She feels comfortable because she can release her feelings freely and gets some pleasure. Her needs are fulfilled when she is close to Frederick.

On the other hand Henry also suffers from mental trauma. His encounter with war changes his outlook on life completely. He was very enthusiastic before being enlisted for war and also before meeting with Catherine. But he was highly depressed and pessimistic after the death of his beloved and after witnessing the harsh realities of war.

He prefers Catherine not because he has any serious commitment to her but because this was better than going away every evening. But when Henry meets her in the hospital after his injury, he undergoes an inward change and his flirtatious attitude towards her changes into true love. He expresses his love for Catherine when he says

God knows I hadn't wanted to fall in love with her.

I hadn't wanted to fall in love with anyone.

But God knows I had ... and all sorts of things
went through my head but I felt wonderful (75).

Hemingway's concept of love and war and its role in the lives of his characters gradually changed and matured from disillusionment with bodily love to an affirmation of true love. Both of them need to release their tension. They are always together for about four months. Catherine says:

We have such a fine time.

I don't take any interest in anything else anymore.

I'm so very happy married to you .(154)

It is only because of war that Catherine is unable to spend time with Henry when she needs him most .When she knows that she is pregnant and Frederic will leave her for service.

She does not tell him because she thinks it is not the right time to tell in the chaos condition. It will disturb him because he will go to front where he will face some problems. She does not want him to think much on her especially her baby. She represses her anxiety. She represses her feeling not to meet him. Thus throughout the novel war tortures her one way or other, it takes away all her happiness and she becomes a rotten figure.

She surrenders before the suffering that war causes her. Finding her twenty letters returned, she gets fainted. She might think that he dies or he does not care her any more. She feels disappointed. It is useless to live without him. The death instinct drives her so that she does not have any spirit to live longer. She has ever experienced before and now she has inborn baby. She castrates herself because she cannot stand living without Frederic. She cannot relieve her tension and anxiety when she realizes that her father figure is lost. She could not live longer. Being depressed and repressed, she castrates herself. War has destroyed her love life. It has taken everything. She has become mentally wreck.

Henry also has gone through mental transformation. Earlier he was just a watcher, he never took war seriously but all his illusions shattered when he himself gets wounded in the war, he then became a changed personality. He himself deserts the army to escape the irrational death. After witnessing the tragic death of his comrades, Henry knows that death awaits him also. It's ironic that Henry, who, initially, had fired at the sergeants for running away now he himself runs away from the soldiers firing at him. He chooses a separate peace with Catherine, away from the world of war. But tragically he is able to live with her for a really brief time because she dies amid a child birth. Henry figures it out that life is essentially appalling and that whichever way one goes in the end, one is trapped. He says:

“Let's drop the war.....

It's very hard. There's no place to drop it” (17).

After the death of Catherine, Henry has been left aside in disillusionment, uncertainty and aimlessness since the disastrous war has made him think that the world he lives in can no longer support his ideas on love, life, happiness and contentment. He bids another farewell the hands of his beloved Catherine who dies in the end during childbirth. Thus "Henry bids farewell to what he hates most and to what he loves most too" (Rama, Rao7).

In this novel, everybody is debilitated of the war and depression overwhelms everyone. Through the cleric, the writer has shown the place of faith in the war-stricken world. The priest and his God have ended up as grimy jokes. The officers have ridiculed and mocked the priest publically.

Henry remembers Catherine, as he causes her death. His hedonistic interlude in Switzerland is yet another escape, and the impossibility of sustaining this kind of existence is spelled out in terms of tragedy. Henry must swallow his grief after Catherine dies in childbirth and go back out into the rain, which is a persistently ominous symbol for death of love unleashed by the war machine.

His treatment of love packed with bitter experiences of war is really remarkable. In this novel, he has displayed his remarkable understanding of both love and war. In the world of war there is no place for love and emotions. War overpowers everything and anyone. Henry and Catherine have presented a devastating picture of war and its absurdities.

To conclude Hemingway has shown the war is the most irrational and nonetheless most damaging of all human activities because it brings solely death, despair and destruction. It's conjointly instrumental in unsuccessful love relationship of Henry and Catherine. Both the lovers learn to value endurance and fortitude after going through the tragic experience of love and war. Gurko (1986) establishes that war eventually "outlasts the lovers"(16). They both love each other however war is massive hurdle within the means of their making love. They couldn't fancy the seventh heaven of affection and bear the curse of war. Love and war make

them psychologically wounded. They left disillusioned, defeated, tormented, tortured and hopeless due to war. The wounded and battered protagonists of Hemingway, suffer from psychological obsession. The novel does demonstrate the impact of the Great War on social and sexual mores, even if it only does so in terms of the basic relationship between Catherine and Frederic Henry. The ending of the novel with the death of the heroine and her baby in the hospital and therefore the hero's lonely return to his hotel room left him mentally wreck.

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